

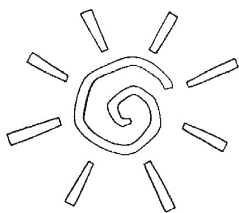
Asset #4: Youth person experiences caring neighbors.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A CARING NEIGHBORHOOD

Research shows that youth who reside in caring neighborhoods enjoy higher grades, better self-esteem, reduced experience of violence, and less substance abuse. And, caring neighborhoods are safer: a study of 343 Chicago neighborhoods revealed that strong communities where adults are willing to intervene in the lives of youth experience reduced acts of truancy, graffiti, and violence. Other benefits of a strong neighborhood include a greater sense of community, improved mobilization for community action, and easier dispute resolution among neighbors, which create a more desirable environment for everyone regardless of age.

The following discussion topics can help you work with young people to become aware of the ways that their neighborhood is caring and identify possible opportunities for improvement .

- Which adults “keep an eye” on neighborhood kids when they’re playing outside to help keep them safe?
- Which adults and families in the neighborhood can you turn to for help in case of an emergency?
- Help your family identify a “safe house” on every nearby block where they can go if they need help.
- Which adults and families should you get to know better? How might you approach them?
- Are there any neighbors who might benefit from assistance, such as senior citizens who may need help with yard work, carrying groceries, or taking their trash and recycling to the curb?



ACTIVITIES

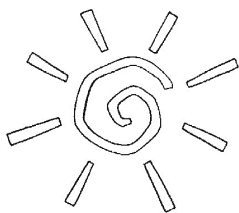
The activities below are a starting point to help create caring neighborhoods.

FOR FAMILIES

- Make an effort to get to know your neighbors, and help your children understand the importance of strong neighborhood bonds. Encourage your children to share toys or activities with other kids on the block.
- Invite another family to go with you when you walk your dog, or ask if you can join a family when they walk theirs.
- With your children, make a map of your street and write down names and a few facts about each neighbor.
- Volunteer to house- and pet-sit when your neighbors go out of town.
- Throw a neighborhood party! Invite everyone on the block together for food, fun, games, and the opportunity to get to know each other better. Be sure to plan activities for youth of all ages.

FOR ALL ADULTS

- Learn the names and interests of the kids in your neighborhood, and find areas that you have in common. Offer to teach a new skill or ask the young person to teach you.
- Let families know that your home represents a “safe house” where their children can come if they need help.
- “Check in” with children and youth who are playing outside, and help them stay safe.
- Establish an emergency contact list for neighbors so that everyone can be reached in case of an urgent matter.
- Volunteer to pick up a neighbor’s children from school or programs.
- Treat neighbors of all ages with courtesy and respect.
- Attend a game, play, or event in which a neighborhood youth is participating.
- Be aware of graduations and other major events in children’s lives.
- Create an email list or online group for neighbors that make it easy to share announcements, invitations, plans, and concerns.



- Support local youth in their fundraisers. Even if you don't care for cookies, candy, wrapping paper, or the other items that the children are selling, your support of their activities shows that you value their goals and efforts.

AT SCHOOL OR IN YOUTH PROGRAMS

- Schools, religious organizations, and youth programs can help create a sense of community in the neighborhoods where they are located, even if your program participants live in different areas. Visit with your immediate neighbors to help them understand your programs and enlist their help in keeping children and youth safe.
- Hold events for the neighborhood, such as a Halloween carnival or 'open house' with children's activities where your neighbors can learn about your programs and visit with each other.
- Develop a service project where youth in your programs volunteer in the surrounding neighborhood, such as picking up litter or assisting the elderly with chores.
- Discuss ways that youth can create a caring community in their own neighborhoods.

**This article was provided courtesy of Project Cornerstone.
For more information, visit www.projectcornerstone.org.**

